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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 466th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 28 May 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. KOLOSOV

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Maldives (CRC/C/8/Add.33 and 37; CRC/C/Q/MAL/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Maldives took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) said that nearly one half of the country's population was under 15 years of age. Although that share was expected to decline to 35 per cent by 2000, over the same period the actual number of children would increase by 15 per cent. As existing resources for child welfare and development were already stretched, new approaches and methods would have to be found. The Government had always made children's welfare a high priority, and it was fully aware of the links between successful national development and the circumstances of children.

3. Maldives had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. That year, declared the Year of the Maldivian Child, had also seen the National Conference on the Maldivian Child, which had adopted the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of the Maldivian Child and led to the establishment of a National Programme of Action. Also in 1991 the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child (Law 9/91) had been passed; it identified the guiding principles and objectives for the State, parents and the community to follow as part of their respective responsibilities towards children's overall development. Now, the major focus of the Government's legal work in implementing the rights of the child was the achievement of improved procedures, harmonized legislation and ratified policies in line with Law 9/91.

4. In 1992, the National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child had been established to monitor the objectives set under the National Plan of Action for Children. In the same year, the Unit for the Rights of the Child (URC) had been set up to support the Council's activities. The URC addressed a range of issues relating to children's rights, and was responsible for their promotion and the distribution of written materials to hospitals, health centres, clinics and schools throughout the atolls and islands. It had also distributed a Dhivehi translation of the Convention and copies of Law 9/91 throughout the country. It provided regular comment on child-related issues on national television and radio, and liaised with key ministries on the preparation of amendments to national laws in their areas of responsibility in accordance with Law 9/91.

5. The URC also provided training on the principles of the Convention for a wide range of staff from various ministries, aimed at raising awareness of children's issues in workplaces, encouraging appropriate institutional policies, practices and measures, and establishing a pool of people capable of providing counselling services. Training in understanding the Convention and in basic counselling skills was also provided for suitably qualified persons on the atolls, the URC's aim being to train personnel on all inhabited islands by the year 2000.

6. The Government was developing an appropriate range of welfare and rehabilitation institutions to address the needs of juvenile offenders. In that regard, significant amendments were also being made to the juvenile justice system and to family law. In order to facilitate the introduction of all the new arrangements, personnel from a number of ministries and the URC had completed a course on criminology and juvenile justice conducted by an Australian university.

7. The URC was also developing a range of services and facilities for children at the national and local levels, including community-based and residential services for children whose rights had been violated or who were in especially difficult circumstances, and a corrective and rehabilitative service for children in conflict with the law or involved in anti-social activities.

8. An analysis of the counselling services the URC provided for children in difficult circumstances and their families suggested that the underlying causes of most child-related problems were broken families and the very high rates of marriage, divorce and remarriage. The number of cases referred to the URC was rising fast, and there was particular concern that the relatively small number of children now engaged in anti-social activities might escalate and develop into a major problem if no preventive measures were taken. The Government had prepared new family legislation to protect the rights and interests of children in the light of the high incidence of divorce and remarriage.

9. The URC had established a national database to collect and store information on cases referred to the URC and to the offices which had been established on all 200 islands. The information received quarterly from the atolls was entered into the central database. In the future, the URC intended to incorporate statistics on the violation of children's education, health and nutrition rights.

10. Finally, despite the significant achievements of the past seven years in improving the protection of children's rights, considerable further work had to be done. The main priorities were to achieve changes in the formation of the family through legislation and awareness raising, to improve children's employment prospects by ensuring that they all completed their education, to establish fixed counselling services for children in conflict with the law or in especially difficult circumstances, to extend the database, to monitor children's situations regularly in order to identify vulnerable groups, and to increase training activities relating to the Convention.

11. Mrs. PALME asked whether, in view of the recent shift in the focus of Maldives' main economic activities, the Government anticipated problems in allocating the resources needed to fully implement the Convention, particularly in education and health.

12. Mr. RABAH asked how the report had been prepared and whether the leading NGOs had participated. He would also like to know if the courts took the Convention into account in cases where the rights of the child were concerned. Finally, he asked the delegation to describe ways in which the best interests of the child were reflected in Maldivian legislation.

13. Mrs. KARP asked whether the fact that the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare was responsible for children's rights reflected a wider assumption in Maldives that only women should be concerned with child care. Secondly, as the implementation of children's rights constituted part of a wider social programme, did they always receive due priority and attention, especially regarding budget allocations? Thirdly, she would like to know more about the interaction between the National Council and the URC in such areas as budgetary allocation, manpower and monitoring, and about the extent of NGO involvement in the preparation of the report.

14. Mr. FULCI congratulated Maldives on having been among the first countries to ratify the Convention and having enacted a law on the rights of the child so early. He would like to know more about the structure and functioning of the National Council, especially in the area of policy implementation, and about the bodies responsible for data collection.

15. Ms. SHIHAM (Maldives), answering the questions which had just been asked, said that there had been a reduction in the external funding available for social welfare, health and education. In order to make up that shortfall, the Government had allocated a greater share of GDP to those areas, on the principle of "allocation to the maximum extent of resources available". The Government had felt constrained to take urgent action because of the very high number of children in the Maldivian population.

16. With regard to preparation of the report, she said that after collating the information on the various articles of the Convention received from ministries and departments, the URC had returned the information to its originators for confirmation, before compiling the report and forwarding it to the Committee.

17. Concerning ways in which the best interests of the child were reflected in national laws, she said that even before it had signed the Convention Maldives had enacted legislation in a number of areas, notably custody, which allowed the courts to decide the best interests of the child in cases where parents could not reach agreement.

18. Law 9/91, the principal legal instrument relating to children's rights, had been adopted after the accession of Maldives to the Convention. It therefore incorporated most provisions of the Convention, and the frequent use made of it in the courts was tantamount to invoking the Convention. Continuous efforts were being made to harmonize the Convention with national laws.

19. The fact that the URC now came under the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare was the result of government reorganization in 1996. The URC had originally been set up as part of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Regarding the relationship between the National Council and the URC, she said that the latter had originally been intended to function as the Council's secretariat. The work of the URC had then expanded considerably, to the extent that it was currently responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention and related national legislation. The Council was a body whose members were designated by the President whose funding was included in the URC budget. The URC coordinated the Council's monthly meetings and submitted issues for its

consideration. The fact that the Council comprised high-level representatives from a wide range of ministries, the Attorney-General's Office and the Maldivian Parliament offered valuable networking opportunities and meant that urgent issues could be dealt with directly.

20. There were very few NGOs in Maldives, owing to a dearth of people outside government with the necessary educational qualifications. The two main ones, dealing with health and women's issues, had not contributed to the report.

21. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said she would like to know more about the system of interaction between the organizations concerned with the protection of children's rights, given the extremely fragmented geographical nature of Maldives.

22. As to the translation of the Convention into Dhivehi, she asked whether all the population spoke that language. If not, what was being done to bring the Convention's principles and provisions to the attention of minority-language speakers, especially in view of the fact that so few people had completed their education.

23. She would like to know more about the mechanisms used by the URC in promoting awareness of the Convention, particularly among children and those who worked with them. The report stated that the URC had distributed 1,000 copies of the Convention to the public, which did not seem a great number. She would also like to know how the provisions of the Convention were received among the more traditional parts of society and among children themselves, particularly adolescents.

24. Finally, she would like further clarification about the relative standing of the Convention and national legislation, and the efforts being made to harmonize them. Was it the case that most of the Convention had been incorporated into national legislation, given the fact that the Constitution of Maldives had been adopted after ratification of the Convention?

25. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what mechanisms were used to monitor implementation of the programme of action mentioned in the delegation's introductory statement, and what was the current status of that programme. She would also like to know the reasons for the URC's change of allegiance from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare. What influence did the new Ministry have and had the change been successful?

26. How did the extremely scattered nature of Maldives affect the coordination of activities for promoting children's rights? And what impact did the reported disparities in an otherwise stable economic growth rate have on the situation of children? Finally, she wondered whether the Government was considering ratifying the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which were normally regarded as the fundamental human rights instruments in the United Nations system, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

27. Mrs. KARP asked whether the Government had conducted any research to test the effectiveness of its efforts to disseminate knowledge of the Convention among children and the general public.

The meeting was suspended at 4 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.

28. Ms. SHIHAM (Maldives), replying to Mrs. Ouedraogo's questions, explained that the URC was striving to overcome monitoring problems by instructing groups of decision and policy-makers on each island about the relevant legislation concerning children. Every year, URC staff visited four atolls, where four to five people from each island were trained to become outreach workers. In order to maintain close contact with those people, URC published four periodicals a year and, of course, used the existing telephone and fax links. Malé comprised four wards and it was likewise incumbent on ward leaders to report any incidents detrimental to children's well-being. Similarly, since primary and secondary schoolteachers and trainee teachers were taught about the Convention, they were fairly conversant with the legal issues at stake and children's needs.

29. Dhivehi was the only language spoken by all Maldivians. Although few people had completed higher education, more than 90 per cent of the population were literate and therefore able to read and understand the Convention. In addition, radio programmes regularly featured the Convention and Maldivians were avid listeners.

30. The question about a conflict between tradition and the Convention was most pertinent. Corporal punishment had been prohibited since the late 1970s and the URC frequently encountered complaints from parents claiming that their offspring were only too aware of their rights. She therefore requested the Committee's guidance on that subject. In an attempt to arrive at a compromise, a national exhibition on children's responsibilities and rights would be held before the end of 1998.

31. The Convention had been ratified before Law 9/91 had been passed. Although the Convention itself could not be invoked in court, its provisions were heeded by the judiciary, insofar as most of its clauses had been incorporated in national law.

32. A National Programme of Action had been drawn up. It had been reviewed by the National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in 1997 and would be updated by the various ministries, because some targets had been achieved. Since the URC was an independent body, it had not been affected by the transfer from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare. She did not know the reason for the transfer.

33. Communication with all the islands was difficult. Nevertheless, since they had telephone links, a helpline had been set up the previous year. There was, however, undeniable disparity between the islands; most facilities were concentrated in the capital, Malé, despite the Government's efforts to provide each island with schools and health facilities, albeit of a lower standard than really desired.

34. Children might not possess a detailed knowledge of the Convention, but they had definitely been made aware of it through television programmes and pamphlets distributed to schools and libraries. Her Government was contemplating ratification of the International Covenants.

35. The CHAIRPERSON invited questions on the definition of the child and general principles.

36. Mrs. PALME sought clarification regarding the important issue of early marriage.

37. Mrs. KARP said that she was puzzled by the status of persons in the 16 to 21 age group. Law 9/91 did not reflect the Convention's philosophy that a child should be seen as an individual whose best interests should be of primary concern and whose views should be heard. She therefore wished to know if Maldives had considered embodying those principles in future laws. Why were 16 to 18-year-olds excluded from Maldivian legislation protecting children which in many respects was highly relevant to that age bracket.

38. Mr. FULCI pointed out that the Maldivian Constitution contained no provision specifically prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion, disability or language. Traditionally women's education had been curtailed and they had been victims of discrimination under Islamic law on inheritance and testimony in court. Referring in that connection to paragraph 30 of the report, he asked if girls were becoming more emancipated.

39. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked why the age of majority had been set at 16. What were the reasons behind relevant laws adopted after ratification of the Convention? What was the status of young people aged between 17 and 20? She believed that the minimum age of marriage should have been laid down by law and parents obliged to respect it. How were early marriages being discouraged? To what extent had the Maldivian Government applied the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women regarding non-discrimination in the education of boys and girls? If Maldivian women traditionally played the roles of wives and mothers, how did they account for 50 per cent of the workforce? What was the status of children born out of wedlock? What was the social position of unmarried mothers? What access did members of the various social strata have to cultural facilities? What was the status of aliens and their children? Did governmental decisions take the best interests of the child into account in the fields of education, nutrition, health and the child's general development? Lastly, she requested more information about the respect shown for the child's opinion in families and at school.

40. Mr. RABAH wished to know the period of compulsory education, the minimum age of employment, especially for girls, the age of criminal responsibility and the minimum age for military service.

41. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) explained that her country's laws were based on the Shariah, which stipulated that a girl could marry when she reached physical maturity, i.e. at the age of 15. Nevertheless, an attempt had been made to raise the minimum age of marriage to 16. As a very large section of the Maldivian population was very young, raising the age of majority to 18

would result in a substantial increase in the percentage of children in the population. Girls were not discriminated against in law, but attitudes were hard to change. Since the Shariah prohibited extramarital sex, parents were reluctant to allow their daughters to leave home to pursue their studies or look for work. Deprived of qualifications and employment, girls often found that the only option open to them was marriage. In Maldives in the past, girls had married at 13 or 14; early marriage currently meant before the age of 16.

42. Ms. SHIHAM (Maldives) explained that the 16 to 21 age group were regarded as adults. Young people could obtain a driving licence at 18 and vote at 21. Her Government would take note of the comments made on Law 9/91, which was indeed designed to strengthen the protection afforded to children. She conceded that tradition and cultural factors usually led to girls inheriting less than their brothers. Government-owned land was, however, being divided equally between girls and boys, and parents were beginning to write wills that bequeathed their personal wealth equally among their offspring.

43. In order to combat the high divorce rate in Maldives, an awareness campaign was being conducted to alert people to the dangers of early marriage and difficulties attendant on divorce, although divorcees were not stigmatized socially. The new Family Law would contain stricter provisions on custody and maintenance and, at the same time, government programmes were being run to offer girls alternatives to early marriage. To that end, small industries were being set up and more secondary schools built, especially, in the southern Maldives, where girls accounted for an overwhelming proportion of pupils.

44. The extended family was the source of much assistance and support, so that even a mother of a large family could go out to work. Unfortunately that situation was changing owing to a trend towards smaller, nuclear families.

45. The best interests of the child were certainly considered as far as health, education and development were concerned. For that reason, the URC took every opportunity to explain to parents that the purpose of Law 9/91 was the overall development of the country predicated on the advancement of every individual. If children were to become good leaders in the future, they must be carefully nurtured and offered wider opportunities. The minimum age of employment was 16, while the age of criminal responsibility varied depending on the offence. There was no minimum age for national service, because the country did not have an army.

46. In response to the question about the position of foreign children, she explained that if a child had one Maldivian parent, he or she automatically acquired Maldivian nationality, provided the parents so wished.

47. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked if more educational opportunities for girls and fewer early marriages were contributing to an improvement in women's position in society. Had the National Policy on Women been adopted? Was it relevant to the girl child? Was there a group within Parliament which supervised the rights of the child and implementation of the Convention? Was there any possibility of securing the participation of island chiefs in work on the

rights of the child? Did Maldives benefit from any bilateral or multilateral overseas development programmes or projects run by United Nations agencies?

48. Mrs. KARP queried the compatibility of Maldivian policy on early marriage with article 1 of the Convention. She asked what measures had been adopted to enable children to participate in the administration of schools and institutions, decisions on placement in institutions, complaints procedures and court hearings (not only those relating to custody). Did pupils help to draw up school rules and curricula?

49. She drew attention to the connection between the best interests of the child and his right to be heard. Since she felt that it was impossible to say what those best interests were without bearing in mind the views of the child himself, she was anxious to know whether that new approach was explained in seminars and guidelines for professional groups.

50. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she wished to return to some questions which had not been answered by the delegation, namely those relating to programmes to give stronger protection to the rights of the girl child, societal organization, access to culture, respect for the child's opinion, and advice to more conservative families who complained that their children were over-zealous in demanding their rights and who had difficulty in accepting the notion of children's rights.

51. She did not quite understand why raising the age of majority to 18 and therefore increasing the number of minors in the population was a problem, and she was still mystified by the status of 16 to 20-year-olds.

52. Mrs. PALME, inquiring about sexual equality in Maldives, considered that while inequality between boys and girls was not enshrined in the law, she gathered that there was de facto inequality occasioned by prevailing social conditions, such as reluctance to allow girls to leave their islands in order to pursue high-school education. Since the Islamic Sharia was unclear on the subject of equality with regard to inheritance, she wondered whether the relevant provisions existed in civil law.

53. The prevalence of divorce and remarriage perforce affected both healthy and disabled children, despite efforts to encourage stability and the fact that women, who were in the majority, were often economically self-reliant.

54. Mr. RABAH, following up his previous question, asked whether the Government of Maldives intended to withdraw its two stated reservations to implementation of the Convention with regard to inheritance and adoption.

55. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) replied that since both reservations were founded on the Sharia, the Government would certainly not withdraw them.

56. All land was currently government-owned and was no longer purchasable. The proportions of an inheritance were not dictated by civil law, and while those who wished could apply the tenets of the Sharia whereby a boy inherited two thirds of property and a girl one third, property was usually divided equally.

57. Replying to Mrs. Palme, she said that there were no specialized groups within Parliament for dealing with specific issues. A new plan for national policy on women had been drafted but not yet adopted. So confident were the authorities that it would be passed without major amendment that its guidelines were already informing current policy.

58. Divorce was traditionally initiated by men, in accordance with the Sharia. While women could seek divorce in the courts, the process was a difficult one. It was hoped that the divorce rate would decline and that easy divorces for men would diminish with a new law currently being drafted and which would oblige them, too, to resort to the courts, where reconciliation would be the first recommended solution.

59. Clarifying her earlier statement concerning the difficulty of raising the maximum age of the child to 18, she said that to do so within an already very young population would stretch the highly inadequate resources earmarked for children's needs. The main reason, however, remained the fact that the age limit was based on the Sharia.

60. Ms. SHIHAM (Maldives), replying to the question on women's leadership, said that despite her country's long tradition of Island and Atoll Chiefs - which could only be phased out with time, an Island Development Committee, half of whose members must be women, had been established and was required to take any island-level decisions. The Island Women's Committee and the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare were also boosting women's awareness of their rights and affording them social and economic empowerment in order to prevent men from continuing to receive credit for work done and decisions taken by women.

61. She appreciated the distinct connection between the best interests of the child and his right to be heard, as did most education personnel. Most schools had committees and boards at which children were encouraged to voice their opinions. Although no such formal arrangements existed for the home, parents were advised on proper child-rearing and care. The URC was also represented on most child-related committees and was consulted on all children's issues. No child was ever placed in the Education and Training Centre for Children - the country's only child rehabilitation centre - without his consent.

62. It was explained to parents lodging general complaints about legislation with the URC that it had been established in the best interests of the child. However, the more usual complaints by parents about a specific aspect of a child's behaviour were met with counselling on basic parenting or learning skills, given simultaneously to child and parent.

63. Young people between 16 and 21 were not automatically mistreated. They were simply covered by a different section of Maldivian legislation and their interests were protected by the Ministry of Youth, which addressed youth issues and conducted youth programmes.

64. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) said that the National Programme for the Promotion of the Girl Child had polled parents on their expectations for their children and found them ambitious for both sons and daughters to receive higher education. However, they had earmarked their sons for the prestigious

professions, and their daughters for professions that would keep them nearer home. The National Programme had embarked upon a parent awareness-raising campaign, but mainly with regard to equal access to health and education.

65. The CHAIRPERSON invited members to comment on the delegation's replies.

66. Mrs. SARDENBERG said she was pleased to learn that Maldives now had a Ministry of Youth and wondered what coordination existed between that Ministry and the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare. Given the country's concern with young people, what was the former's role in the implementation of the Convention?

67. Mrs. PALME, pursuing the question of discrimination between girls and boys, said the fact that special programmes for the promotion of girls and discussion with parents were a focal point of policy, appeared to suggest that discrimination existed, although not under the law. That was an important matter, and was reflected in the divorce laws, which gave an inordinate degree of freedom to men, enabling them to take the initiative in divorce proceedings. The common reference to "marrying off" girls was unnatural even in its language and reflected an attitude not unique to Maldives, and one confronted by many developed countries. She simply wished to emphasize the importance of such work and underscore the inequalities between boys and girls.

68. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) explained that although youth and sport had been removed from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare, youth comprised both sexes so that youth programmes and policy also concerned young women. That Ministry checked whether youth programmes targeted young women as well as young men, and was striving to make the public realize that young women were equally a part of the youth population.

69. The only course of action the country could currently adopt in order to alter the traditional attitude that girls should be "married off" was to promote awareness and provide more education and training for women.

70. Ms. SHIHAM (Maldives), replying to Mrs. Sardenberg, said that coordination of the various child-related government bodies was ensured by the Ministry of Youth's representation on the National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and on the National Council for Youth Affairs, on which the URC was also represented, as it was on the National Council for Women's Affairs. Children did not cease to be protected after the age of 16. Their rights, as young people, were simply protected by a different Ministry.

71. The CHAIRPERSON invited members' comments on civil rights and freedoms.

72. Mr. FULCI inquired whether the child's right to freedom of association and assembly, as enshrined in article 15 of the Convention, was explicitly recognized in Maldives legislation.

73. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked what fine was imposed on parents who failed to register a child's birth and what measures were in place, pursuant to the Convention, to facilitate registration, especially in the outlying islands.

74. While welcoming the amendment of the citizenship law, she wondered why the child of a foreign father and Maldivian mother did not automatically accede to Maldivian citizenship as occurred in the reverse case, and inquired as to the conditions necessary for such accession. She also wished to know the circumstances, if any, in which a child could lose Maldivian citizenship.

75. She inquired what measures were being taken by the Government to encourage children's free expression of thought, conscience and religion. Since the country was entirely Muslim, as stated in the report, she wondered whether there were any non-Muslim Maldivians and, if so, what was their social status, and whether they were discriminated against. For instance, were mixed marriages allowed? The fact that non-Muslims could practise their religion in the privacy of their homes, implying that they were prevented from doing so in public, suggested religious discrimination.

76. She inquired what specific measures had been adopted by the Government to ensure compliance with the provisions on torture and ill-treatment contained in paragraphs 46 and 47 of the report. Did any monitoring, complaint or rehabilitation mechanisms exist? Were children aware of the provision, and by what procedures were they encouraged to denounce abuse, even when perpetrated by their families?

77. She sought additional information concerning measures for censorship of films and video recordings and parental permission for child viewing of violent and pornographic material and wondered whether parental control was encouraged through education. Given the country's booming tourist industry, she also wondered whether children were routinely informed about paedophile, child-abduction and prostitution rings.

78. Mrs. KARP asked whether corporal punishment was prohibited in institutions other than schools, and whether parents were counselled on its prevention. It would also be interesting to know the situation of students over 16 - who were legally no longer children - with regard to corporal punishment.

79. Mr. RABAH inquired about the conditions for foreigners to accede to Maldivian nationality and whether a child's situation was affected by his parents' loss of nationality, for whatever reason.

80. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) explained that the Constitutions established certain conditions for foreigners to become Maldivian citizens, such as a determined period of residence in Maldives, literacy and adherence to the Muslim faith. Maldivian citizens could marry foreigners, provided that they belonged to or adopted the Muslim faith. The parents could decide which of the two nationalities the child should adopt.

81. Replying to Mrs. Ouedraogo, she explained that, inasmuch as Maldives had no churches, synagogues or temples, the provision that non-Muslims could practise their religion in privacy was intended to be practical rather than discriminatory.

82. Ms. SHIHAM (Maldives), in response to Mr. Fulci's question, said that the child's right to freedom was not included in Law 9/91. Replying to

Mrs. Karp, she reiterated that inhumane treatment was prohibited in all institutions, and parents who discovered any case could complain to the Ministry of Education or the URC, both of which would refer the matter to the courts. No special monitoring mechanism was needed because, given the country's tiny population, any incidents were rapidly discovered and could be reported by anyone. If they occurred on an island, the body to which complaints were submitted was either the Ministry of Education or the Island Office, whence they were transmitted to the URC and thence to the Attorney-General's Office. It was mandatory in Maldives to report any known or suspected cases of physical or psychological abuse, and the informant was assured of confidentiality.

83. National and foreign films and video recordings were viewed by one "censor board", which rated them fit or unfit for children's viewing. Another at the Education Development Centre censored books and pamphlets, and yet a third censored productions on Television Maldives. Since all videos were censored, no need was felt for a child-information system on the dangers of paedophile rings and sex crimes. However, it might become necessary with the introduction of the Internet.

84. To her knowledge, no person had ever lost his nationality in Maldives. If such a case were to occur, children should not be affected; that was a topic worthy of consideration.

85. Births were attended by health workers and/or the traditional birth attendants ("foolhuma"), who issued the father with a registration form, which had to be delivered to the Island Office within seven days. Non-compliance carried a fine which, although small, was aggregated and so served as a deterrent. Children seeking normal medical check-ups were required to show their birth certificates and defaulters were soon discovered. If investigation showed that the father was unable to pay the fine, the birth certificate was still issued. The intimacy among inhabitants of islands with tiny populations made such occurrences rare. The need for regular reporting to the Department of Public Health and the Ministry of Health and entry into the database encouraged compliance.

86. Replying to Mrs. Karp's question, she said that the law prohibited corporal punishment of all persons in schools, not merely of children. Therefore reports of violence in any institution were duly investigated.

87. Freedom of expression was not explicitly provided for in Law 9/91.

88. Mr. RABAH asked whether the application of the Sharia, the Koran and other sources was merely customary or whether it was specifically embodied in legislation.

89. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) explained that explicit provisions in the Sharia, concerning such matters as inheritance, testimony and headship of the State, were also clearly stated in the Constitution, while the remainder of the Constitution and the laws were merely guided by the Sharia.

90. Mr. RABAH asked whether the requirement of adherence to the Muslim faith for acceding to Maldivian citizenship was based on the Sharia.

91. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) replied that it was not.

92. Mr. RABAH asked whether that requirement ran counter to the Sharia, which did not differentiate between Muslim and non-Muslim.

93. Ms. YOOSUF (Maldives) explained that while the nationality law was not contrary to the Sharia, it was not based on it, but rather on the need to protect the sovereignty of a tiny nation.

94. Mrs. SARDENBERG wondered whether there were other fundamental aspects that were not based on the Sharia.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.